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UNESCO Convention could limit freedom of cultural expressions and trade

Paris, France -- U.S. Ambassador to UNESCO Louise V. Oliver told the UNESCO General Conference Plenary today that the United States could not support the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions because it did not promote cultural diversity and could be misused by governments to deny their citizens' human rights and fundamental freedoms and inhibit international trade. Oliver pointed out that "The United States is the most open country in the world to the diversity of the world's cultures, people, and products. It is not only a part of our heritage but the essence of our national identity."

"This convention as now drafted," Oliver stated, "could be used by states to justify policies that could be used or abused to control the cultural lives of their citizens -- policies that a state might use to control what its citizens can see; what they can read; what they can listen to; and what they can do. We believe -- in keeping with existing conventions -- that the world must affirm the right of all people to make these decisions for themselves."

Oliver called the process leading up to the adoption of the convention an overly hasty one that did not permit negotiations that would have led to true consensus. She called the resulting document deeply flawed, ambiguous, and inconsistent.

Oliver emphasized: “We have been clear that the Convention cannot properly and must not be read to prevail over or modify rights and obligations under other international agreements, including WTO Agreements. Potential ambiguities in the Convention must not be allowed to endanger what the global community has achieved, over many years, in the areas of free trade, the free flow of information, and freedom of choice in cultural expression and enjoyment. We have been assured by a number of other delegations that the Convention is not intended to modify or prevail over the rights and obligations of Parties arising under other international agreements. We sincerely hope and expect to observe over time that the actions of governments that ratify the Convention will be consistent with these assurances, and not in line with the troubling public statements of officials of some governments.”